(b) if so, what were the circumstances which led to this situation which adversely affected the functioning of Air Force for nine years;

(c) what action has been taken in this regard; and

(d) what steps are proposed to be taken to avoid such a situation in furture?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) The system in question is an indigenous development project. The contract for the project was signed in March 1995. Flight trials are scheduled to be held in May 2000.

(b) Self-reliance is a desirable goal, specially in the sensitive field of Signal Intelligence. Some delays are inevitable in a developmental project of this magnitude.

(c) and (d) All developmental projects are monitored by designated committees which oversee their implementation.

Purchase of Multiple Rocket Launchers from Russia

618. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have plan to purachse Russia's powerful Smerch Multiple Rocket Launchers (MRL);

(b) if so, by when; and

(c) whether Government have already considered that many equipments purchased earlier by different Ministries from Russia have become incorporative in absence of spares and/or upgradation of technology?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) and (b) A proposal for procurement of Multi Barrel Rocket Launchers (MBRL) from Russia has been received from the Army HQrs. No decision in the matter has, however, yet been taken by the Government.

(c) Consequent upon the structural reorganisation of the erstwhile USSR, problems were experienced in procurement of spares for the equipments of Soviet origin. These have been largely resolved. Such aspects like required supply of spares and/or upgradation of technology are kept in mind while considering procurement of equipments from various sources.